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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 003422

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2015

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SUBJECT: IN KUWAIT, POLITICS AS USUAL AFTER DEATH OF SAUDI KING FAHD

Classified By: Political Chief Natalie E. Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) Summary: The death of Saudi King Fahd elicited little surprise in Kuwait. With both the Amir and the Crown Prince old and ailing, however, King Fahd's death has renewed speculation on Kuwait's own succession issues (septel). Crown Prince Abdullah's accession to the Saudi throne will have little impact on Saudi-Kuwait relations, sources say. One Kuwaiti political observer predicted King Abdullah would try to reassert control over the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), particularly vis-a-vis relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Post contacts disagreed over King Abdullah's ability, and desire, to implement reforms. All indications suggest it will be politics as usual in Kuwait after King Fahd's death. End summary.

Kuwait Remembers the King

2. (SBU) While largely expected, Kuwaitis still reacted emotionally to King Fahd's death. Kuwaiti newspapers ran multiple-page articles covering King Fahd's death and reflecting on his role in the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq in 1991. August 2 is the fifteenth anniversary of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Affect on Saudi Politics

3. (C) On August 2, PolOff and PDOff met separately with former editor-in-chief of Arabic daily Al-Watan Mohammed Al-Jassem and Kuwaiti liberal Ahmed Deyain, both astute political observers in Kuwait, to discuss the ramifications of King Fahd's death. Reflecting on the impact of King Fahd's death on Saudi internal politics, Al-Jassem said King Abdullah's new power would allow him to implement reforms over the objections of other family members, most notably Prince Sultan, now Crown Prince, and Interior Minister Prince Nayef. He predicted King Abdullah would release three recently imprisoned reform activists, give women the right to vote in national elections, and renew the battle against Islamic extremists. Al-Jassem suggested the U.S. should support these efforts "quietly."

4. (C) Deyain, however, argued that King Abdullah will still face resistance to reform from Princes Sultan and Nayef, who have considerable influence within the Saudi royal family. Al-Jassem agreed that Prince Nayef was the greatest obstacle to reform in Saudi Arabia, but was more optimistic about King Abdullah's ability to circumvent him. Al-Jassem also noted that Kuwaiti Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah does not like Saudi Crown Prince Sultan, which might have political implications should the Crown Prince become the next Saudi King.

Affect on Kuwait

5. (C) Deyain predicted the death of King Fahd would have one of two effects on Kuwait: either the ruling family would be spurred to address the succession question now, or, more characteristically, the Prime Minister would delay a decision on the issue as long as possible. Deyain speculated that the Al-Sabahs would prefer to deal with the succession issue within the family, rather than turn it over to a complicated process involving the National Assembly. He suggested the family might convince Crown Prince Shaykh Saad Al-Salim Al-Sabah to abdicate, rather than be forced to resign.

Affect on GCC

6. (C) Al-Jassem speculated that King Abdullah would try to reassert Saudi control over the GCC. He predicted Saudi relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates would be particularly affected. Deyain differed slightly arguing that, while relations with Qatar and the UAE would remain tense, Saudi political focus would shift from the Gulf countries to other Arab states, notably Egypt and Syria. Neither predicted major foreign policy shifts, however.

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